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ABSTRACT

Critical thinkers must be critical about critical thinking itself, and because there is a close conceptual connection between critical thinking and rationality, the demand for justification for a commitment to critical thinking is tantamount to a demand for reasons that justify a commitment to rationality. Several authors have argued that the demand for justification of rationality is a bogus demand because there is an unremovable circularity in offering reasons for being rational. Among the authors whose views are examined in this paper are Roger Trigg, Anthony O'Hear, and Karl Popper. This paper argues that the demand for justification of rationality and its relevance to critical thinking is legitimate, and it offers, therefore, a self-reflexive justification of rationality. It is argued that rationality can be seen as self-justifying in that seriously querying the justificatory status of rationality presupposes that very status. To ask for reasons that justify being rational commits one to a recognition of the epistemic force of reasons; therefore, one should be rational because reasons have force. Determining why educators should be rational provides an underlying rationale and justification for efforts to foster critical thinking in the schools. (IAH)

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Why Be Rational? On Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking

Harvey Siegel

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Why Be Rational?
On Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking

Harvey Siegel

> Reason, at last, joins all those other abstract monsters such as Obligation, Duty, Morality, Truth and their more concrete predecessors, the Gods, which were once used to intimidate man and restrict his free and happy development: it withers away...
>
> Feyerabend, *Against Method*

> ..in some cases it is really more creditable to be carried away by an emotion, however unreasonable,... than to be unmoved. [A person] who is always sensible is to be suspected and is of little worth.
>
> Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Introduction

Critical thinkers must be critical about critical thinking itself. The quest for reasons and justification which is central to critical thinking must be respected even when the quest self-reflexively involves reasons for engaging in critical thinking. 'Why should I (or anyone) engage in critical thinking?' and 'Why should I value critical thinking?' are questions which must be respected, and seen as legitimate, by proponents of critical thinking. Since those proponents conceive of their commitment to critical thinking as itself justified, they are bound to strive to provide reasons which justify that commitment. If they don't, or can't, their commitment to critical thinking is inconsistent with their own ideal of having their commitments accord with reasons which justify them. A fundamental task for the theory of critical thinking, therefore, is to fend off this threatening inconsistency by providing reasons which justify our educational commitment to critical thinking.[1]

Because of the close conceptual connection between critical thinking and rationality--I have suggested elsewhere[2] that the former is the *educational cognate* of the latter--the demand for reasons which justify a commitment to critical thinking is tantamount to a demand for reasons which justify a commitment to rationality. Our operative question, then, is 'Why should I (or anyone) be rational?' (or, alternatively, 'Why should I value rationality?')

The problem of justifying rationality is a classic philosophical problem. Many eminent philosophers have dismissed our question as confused or as a pseudo-question which does not need an answer: others have argued that the question is proper but has no satisfactory answer; still others have argued (as the opening citations suggest) that we should not be rational or value rationality. If any of these views is correct, however, then the proponent of critical thinking appears to be in trouble, for her commitment to critical thinking will be uncritical and unjustified, and so will be inconsistent with her own ideal.

In what follows I consider the problem of justifying rationality (and its relevance to the theory of critical thinking). I will first consider the major philosophical responses to the problem; then I will offer my own. I will argue that the demand for a justification of rationality (and so critical thinking) is legitimate; and I will offer a justification which I claim satisfies the demand.

I. The Question is Confused

Several authors have argued that the demand for a justification of rationality is a bogus demand. The general idea underlying the rejection of the demand is that there is an unremovable circularity in offering reasons for being rational. Being rational involves believing and acting in accordance with reasons; asking for reasons which justify believing and acting in accordance with reasons presupposes the legitimacy of believing and acting in accordance with reasons. Consequently, reasons which offer putative justification for believing and acting that way cannot, in principle, add anything to the reasons we have for believing and acting in particular ways. Any answer to 'Why be rational?' will necessarily be circular; since the question cannot, even in principle, be answered in an informative way, it is and must be a defective question. The demand for a justification of rationality, on this view, is simply a bogus demand, which fails to recognize the limit beyond which one cannot meaningfully press the demand for reasons.

Roger Trigg, for example, suggests that:

> Any attempt to justify rationality must avoid... any suspicion of invoking an arbitrary commitment [to rationality]. The trouble is that any justification...must give reasons for rationality which are themselves subject to rational scrutiny. The circularity involved in this latter exercise seems inherent in any justification of rationality. It seems as if it is logically impossible to justify being rational.[3]

Anthony O'Hear similarly points to the seeming impossibility of providing a non-circular justification of rationality:

> ...there is something paradoxical in the very attempt to produce a reasoned defence of reason itself.... Rationalism...[consists in] a commitment to critical argument and experience. Any rational defence of a position is one that appeals to argument and experience. In the case of rationalism itself, then, a rational defence is viciously circular... [There is] a fatal inconsistency in the very attempt to defend rationalism by rational means....any argumentative defence of arguments begs the question.[4]

Neither Trigg nor O'Hear conclude, from the apparent fact that attempts to justify rationality must be question-begging or circular, that rationality itself cannot be rationally justified. They conclude, rather, that the impossibility of providing a non-circular justification of rationality shows that the demand for such a justification is an illegitimate demand; that it is a mistake to suppose that rationality needs to be justified:

> There must...be something very odd with the notion of a *justification* of rationality, because clearly it is itself a concept from *within* rationality. Anyone who wants such a justification wants to stand outside the framework of rationality while remaining inside, and this is obviously incoherent.[5]

> ...the natural conclusion to draw from this [the impossibility of providing a non-circular or non-question-begging justification of rationality] is that the demand for justification of this sort is senseless. [There is no] rational standard against which rationality...fails to be rational. It fails only to satisfy a demand which, for logical reasons, cannot be satisfied, and this could hardly be held against it or be taken to show its irrationality.[6]

> [The rationalist] takes it for granted that one must be able to justify a position, but this could clearly only be so if it is logically possible that a justification be forthcoming. If it is not, there can be no shame in not being able to give one.[7]

For both Trigg and O'Hear[8] then, the question of justifying rationality is misconceived. It is impossible, on their view, rationally to justify a commitment to rationality. If this impossibility were a contingent impossibility, we would be forced to conclude that a commitment to rationality must be a- or irrational. But since it is logically or in principle impossible to justify rationality, it is a confusion even to raise the question of the rationality of a commitment to rationality. The demand for a justification of rationality is thus a bogus demand.

This rejection of the demand for an answer to the question 'Why be rational?' is I think mistaken. For one thing, the rejection hinges on determining that it is not merely contingently impossible non-circularly to answer the question, but rather that it is logically or in principle

impossible to do so. But this determination can only be made by considering candidate answers and the characteristics of theoretically possible answers. Thus, on the line Trigg and O'Hear take, the demand for a justification of rationality starts out being legitimate, and becomes illegitimate only after it has been fruitlessly pursued and considered for a time. This appears to make the purported illegitimacy of the demand a rather convenient out for the friend of rationality, rather than a satisfying or satisfactory account of why that friend should not be bothered by her inability to meet the challenge posed by the demand.[9]

Second, it is not clear that there is anything problematic about the stance the rationalist takes towards the demand. Trigg writes, in the passage most recently cited, that '[The rationalist] takes it for granted that one must be able to justify a position, but this could clearly only be so if it is logically possible that a justification be forthcoming.' But what is troublesome about the rationalist's taking it for granted that one must be able to justify a position *if that position is to be rationally justified*? Here it seems that the rationalist is perfectly justified in taking for granted what she does: if it turns out that it is not 'logically possible that a justification be forthcoming' for some claim or position, then the rationalist should conclude that that claim, if held, is held a- or irrationally. Trigg provides no reason for thinking that what the rationalist assumes--namely, that for a position to enjoy rational justification, one must be able to justify it--is in any way problematic. If it turns out that it is not logically possible that a justification for some claim be forthcoming, then the rationalist--and anyone else--should conclude not that the demand for justification of the claim is inappropriate or illegitimate, but simply that the claim does not and cannot enjoy rational justification. And this conclusion should apply to the rationalist's embrace of her own position. Showing that it is not possible to justify some position, in short, in no way undermines the rationalist's contention that that position, embraced without justification, is not a rationally justified position; nor does it undermine her contention that to be justified in embracing a position--even one concerning the possibility and necessity of rational justification itself--one must appeal to reasons which warrant or justify that position.

Third, despite the arguments canvassed thus far, the demand for a justification of rationality remains perfectly legitimate. When our critical thinking students ask questions like 'Why is a certain form of reasoning, e.g. *post hoc* reasoning, fallacious?', we are obliged to answer, and we do, by pointing out the inability of that form of reasoning to provide proper warrant for conclusions reached by that argumentative route. (Here we appeal to epistemology to determine the warrant such reasoning provides.) When they ask 'Why should we not be moved by fallacious reasoning?', we are obliged to answer, and we do, by pointing out that if they are asking why they should not be *rationally* moved by fallacious reasoning, then they should not be moved by fallacious reasoning because such reasoning fails to warrant the conclusions it reaches. (Here again

our appeal is to epistemology, specifically to the epistemology of informal logic.) When they ask 'Why should we be governed by such epistemological concerns--why shouldn't we be moved to accept some conclusion, even though it is reached by fallacious reasoning which can't *rationally* move us?', they are asking for reasons for accepting our view of the importance of epistemological constraints on our thinking, believing and acting, and of the importance of rationality more generally. In this case our students are asking why they should be rational. If we cannot answer them, then they will have detected a fundamental inconsistency in our position: we encourage them to think critically, to seek reasons and justifications with which to guide their beliefs and actions, and to believe and act on the basis of reasons; yet for this fundamental lesson, concerning the importance and value of rationality, we can provide no reasons or justification. If they accept our teaching of this lesson, then they should reject it, since the lesson instructs them to embrace only that which can be justified, and this lesson itself cannot be. Any student who took our lesson to heart would soon discover this lacuna at its core, a gap sufficient to undermine the lesson. And it would help us not a bit to learn from Trigg and O'Hear that the gap is logically impossible to fill. In this case we would have to conclude, with our students, that our lesson falls to a fundamental reflexive difficulty: what it urges generally, it cannot satisfy itself. The demand for reasons which warrant a commitment to rationality is as legitimate a demand as is the demand for reasons which warrant any other claim, position or commitment.

If the demand for reasons which justify a commitment to rationality is legitimate, then friends of rationality cannot escape that demand by suggesting, as Trigg and O'Hear suggest, that it is logically impossible to meet it. This result--that the demand is legitimate--leaves the rationalist with the burden of justifying her commitment to rationality. This is the challenge I hope to meet below. I could not do so if Trigg and O'Hear were correct in thinking that meeting it is logically impossible. Fortunately, they are not. They have not shown that reasons which justify rationality must be viciously circular or question-begging. I shall argue in the next section that there is a sort of justificationist strategy--a self-reflexive strategy--that, if successful, justifies rationality without vicious circularity or question-begging.

I conclude, then, that the demand for a justification of rationality is legitimate. Below I will try to meet it. First, let us look at the position defended by Karl Popper, who argues that the demand is legitimate but cannot be met, so that the commitment to rationality cannot be justified and rests instead on an irrational faith in reason.

II. The Question Is Legitimate, But Cannot Be Rationally Answered

On Popper's view, 'Why be rational?' is a perfectly legitimate question which must be recognized as such by the rationalist. But the question cannot be answered in a way which justifies the rationalist

position, for all attempts to justify rationality will in the end be circular or question-begging, and excusing the rationalist position from its self-imposed demand for justification will render the position inconsistent. We must settle, says Popper, for an irrational commitment to rationality:

> Uncritical or comprehensive rationalism can be described as the attitude of the person who says 'I am not prepared to accept anything that cannot be defended by means of argument or experience.' We can express this also in the form of the principle that any assumption which cannot be supported either by argument or by experience is to be discarded. Now it is easy to see that this principle of an uncritical rationalism is inconsistent; for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or by experience, it implies that it should itself be discarded....
>
> But this means that whoever adopts the rationalist attitude does so because he has adopted, consciously or unconsciously, some proposal, or decision, or belief, or behaviour; an adoption which may be called 'irrational'. Whether this adoption is tentative or leads to a settled habit, we may describe it as an irrational *faith in reason*....
>
> Although an uncritical and comprehensive rationalism is logically untenable, and although a comprehensive irrationalism is logically tenable, this is no reason why we should adopt the latter. For there are other tenable attitudes, notably that of critical rationalism which recognizes the fact that the fundamental rationalist attitude results from an (at least tentative) act of faith--from faith in reason. Accordingly, our choice is open. We may choose some form of irrationalism, even some radical or comprehensive form. But we are also free to choose a critical form of rationalism, one which frankly admits its origin in an irrational decision (and which, to that extent, admits a certain priority of irrationalism).[10]

Popper here frankly regards the question 'Why be rational?' as a legitimate one; he despairs, however, of any attempt to rationally justify a commitment to rationality or the adoption of 'the rationalist attitude.' At bottom, according to Popper, we must irrationally embrace rationalism. A rational justification of rationality simply cannot be had. As O'Hear summarizes Popper's view:

> ...rationalism, however desirable it may be, is ultimately a matter of irrational faith.[11]

Popper is right, I have already argued, concerning the legi-timacy of the question: 'Why be rational?' is a question which demands, and deserves, an answer, if our commitment to rationality is itself to be

rationally justified. But is Popper correct that there can be no rational justification of rationality?

A preliminary difficulty with Popper's position is that he does offer reasons for adopting critical rationalism, i.e. the view that we should value and commit ourselves to rationality but recognize that doing so rests upon an irrational faith in reason.[12] In arguing for critical rationalism, he offers reasons which in his view are not inconsistent, circular or question-begging. If it is possible rationally to defend critical rationalism, why should it not be possible to defend a comprehensive rationalism which does not admit a 'priority of irrationalism', as Popper's more limited critical rationalism does?[13]

The answer, at least for Popper, is that defending comprehensive rationalism (as opposed to a more limited rationalism) must necessarily be inconsistent. Consider again the passage recently cited:

> ...this principle of an uncritical rationalism is inconsistent; for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or by experience, it implies that it should itself be discarded.

But why can't comprehehensive rationalism itself be supported by rational argument? Presumably, Popper thinks that it can't for the same reasons given earlier by Trigg and O'Hear: such an appeal to rational argument to support comprehensive rationalism, if consistent, would be viciously circular or question-begging:

> The trouble is that any justification...must give reasons for rationality which are themselves subject to rational scrutiny. The circularity involved in this latter exercise seems inherent in any justification of rationality. (Trigg)

> Rationalism...[consists in] a commitment to critical argument and experience. Any rational defence of a position is one that appeals to argument and experience. In the case of rationalism itself, then, a rational defence is viciously circular... [There is] a fatal inconsistency in the very attempt to defend rationalism by rational means....any argumentative defence of arguments begs the question. (O'Hear)

But are these authors correct that any rational defense of rationism is doomed to inconsistency, vicious circularity, or question-begging? The appearance of the unavoidability of logical difficulties with a rational defense of rationalism is due to the following looming dialogue:

Rationalist: One should be rational because there are good reaons for being so.

Skeptic: But why should one heed those reasons? Why be rational?

Rationalist: Because there are good reasons for being so.

Skeptic: But again: why should one be moved by such reasons?

As this brief dialogue suggests, the rationalist appears to have to assume rationalism in order to argue the case for it. Since that assumption is the very question at issue, however, such a response will beg the question at issue, or be viciously circular, or, if rationalism is excused from the requirement of justification, be inconsistent with its own precepts. It appears that a rational justification of rationality cannot be had.

But this presumes that the rationalist cannot utilize a certain kind of argumentative strategy--a *self-reflexive* strategy--that promises to supply the wanted justification without the attendant logical difficulties. Below I will offer a self-reflexive justification of rationality; first I want simply to illustrate the strategy and show how it can be used in circumstances in which circularity and question-begging seem to threaten.

Consider first an example concerning explanation. Evolutionary theory can explain not only the evolution of fish and molecules, it can also explain the evolution of creatures capable of formulating evolutionary theory itself. It can explain (at least in principle) its own evolution, both in terms of the evolution of creatures who have formulated it, and its own 'evolution' (in the sense of a Popperian 'evolutionary epistemology') from its earliest formulations to a theory very much more complex and informative than those early formulations. In this sense evolutionary theory can self-reflexively explain its own evolution: the theory contributes to its own explanation. But it does so without being inconsistent, viciously circular, or question-begging.

Philosophical theories often need to be, and are, self-reflexive in this way. Epistemic theories of justification, to take an example close to our present concerns, need themselves to be justified, and theorists of various epistemological persuasions--foundationalists, coherentists, pragmatists, naturalists, etc.--regularly offer accounts of epistemic justification which they hope will both succeed as accounts of such justification, and also will turn out themselves to be justified in their own terms. Such accounts self-reflexively apply to themselves. But they are not necessarily logically defective for doing so. Indeed, if it were not possible for an account of justification to apply self-reflexively to itself, there could be no theory of epistemic justification which was itself justified. This would constitute an argument, not merely for the irrationality of rationalism, but for wholesale skepticism, since no

judgment concerning epistemic justification could be itself justified. The problems facing such versions of skepticism are well known. In any case, epistemologists are quite content to apply their theories of justification self-reflexively: foundationalists hope to show that foundationalism follows appropriately from appropriate foundational beliefs; coherentists hope to show that coherentism most adequately coheres with other relevant beliefs; naturalists hope to show that naturalism is the theory of justification most justified by naturalistic epistemological inquiry; and so on. In all these cases, theories are offered which self-reflexively apply to themselves. If successful, they can be thought of as *self-justifying*: justified by themselves, without need for recourse to self-exception or to other avenues of justification which open the door to problems of inconsistency, circularity, or question-begging. It is clear, I think, that evolutionary theory can properly be thought of as self-explanatory, and that theories of epistemic justification can properly be thought of as self-reflexively self-justifying. If so, then attempts to justify rationality need not necessarily fall to insuperable logical difficulties; the examples just given serve as counter-examples to the claims of Popper, Trigg and O'Hear to the contrary.

What is needed, then, is a self-reflexive justification of rationality. To this I now turn.[14]

III. The Question Can Be Answered: Rationality Is Self-Justifying

Consider again the brief dialogue reviewed above:

Rationalist: One should be rational because there are good reasons for being so.

Skeptic: But why should one heed those reasons? Why be rational?

Rationalist: Because there are good reasons for being so.

Skeptic: But again: why should one be moved by such reasons?

This dialogue appears to be a depressing one for the rationalist, for it appears to show that the rationalist cannot adequately answer her opponent without begging the question against her or arguing in a circle. I believe, though, that this appearance is dispelled once one pays more attention to the skeptic's own position, and to the possibility of the rationalist employing a self-reflexive justificatory strategy.

The skeptic is herself asking our question. She is asking 'Why be rational?'; that is, she is asking for reasons which justify the rationalist's commitment to rationality. She is suggesting that if reasons cannot be adduced which justify the rationalist's position, then that position fails to be justified and so fails to command the rationalist's respect.

In doing so, the skeptic is playing the rationalist's game. Indeed, she is presupposing[15] rationalism, in that she is asking for reasons which justify a position in order to determine whether or not the position is actually justified or is worthy of embrace. Of course in this instance the position in question is that of rationalism itself. But that is irrelevant to the present point, which is that the skeptic is presupposing rationalism in order to call it into question. In presupposing it, she is inadvertently determining the outcome of her inquiry: rationality, and the commitment to it, cannot help but turn out to be themselves rationally justified, because they are presupposed by the very posing of the question concerning their justificatory status.

The point can be seen from a slightly different angle: in asking 'Why be rational?', the skeptic is asking for reasons which justify rationality and our commitment to it. In genuinely or seriously asking the question, she is committing herself to take seriously putative reasons for being rational. Consequently, she is acknowledging the potential epistemic force of reasons which purport to answer her question; in so doing, she is presupposing the very rationalism her inquiry calls into question. The very posing of the question 'Why be rational?', in short, is possible only if rationalism is assumed. For the serious posing of any question presupposes the possibility of finding putative answers, and answers just are reasons for settling questions one way or another. Thus the posing of our question presupposes the possible forcefulness of putative answers, and so presupposes the epistemic legitimacy of reasons and the appeal to reasons. And that reasons are legitimate and forceful just is the position of the rationalist. The serious posing of the question assures the justifiedness of the rationalist's stance.

Rationality can thus be seen to be self-justifying, in that seriously querying the justificatory status of rationality presupposes that very status. In order seriously to question the value or justificatory status of rationality, one must assume the relevance of considerations which rationally support one or another answer to the question; in so assuming, one is presupposing the rationalist's position. To raise the question is to answer it in favor of rationality. In this sense rationality is self-justifying: one cannot question it except by accepting it, for acceptance is a precondition of the serious posing of the question. To ask 'Why be rational?' is to ask for *reasons* for and against being rational; to entertain the question seriously is to acknowledge the force of reasons in ascertaining the answer. The very raising of the question, in other words, commits one to a recognition of the epistemic force of reasons. To recognize that force is to recognize the answer to the question: we should be rational because (for the reason that) reasons have force.[16] Of course one might never ask the question. But once one wonders whether or not (or why) one should be rational, one's wondering insures that one has reasons for being rational.

This solution to our problem has it that rationality is self-justifying in the same sense that theories of epistemic justification purport to be self-justifying: reasons are epistemically forceful in determing belief and action, and this is true even in the case when the question before us is the fundamental one of whether (and why) we should believe and act in accordance with reasons--that is, of whether and why we should be rational. Earlier we saw that Popper, Trigg and O'Hear regard the question as one which does not admit of an answer free of logical difficulty. Let us see if my proposed solution is free of the difficulties adumbrated by those authors.

Popper, we saw, argues that a rational justification of rationality, if it is to avoid question-begging or vicious circularity, must be inconsistent, since the only way to avoid those logical difficulties is to exempt rationality from its own requirement, imposed on every other claim or position, that it itself be justified on the basis of reasons and argument. But on the solution proposed, rationality is not exempted from its own constraints on rational justification. It is itself justified on the basis of the argument given above.

This solution, Popper might claim (as Trigg and O'Hear claim), avoids inconsistency by falling prey either to question-begging or to vicious circularity: I am justifying rationality by appealing to reasons, but such an appeal begs the question against the skeptic who has not already recognized the legitimacy of the appeal to reasons. The solution, however, does not beg the question against the skeptic or argue in a circle. Rather, it points out that the skeptic, in posing her skeptical question, has already committed herself to and recognized the epistemic forcefulness and legitimacy of reasons and the appeal to them. It points out, in short, that the only way the question can meaningfully be posed is one which determines that the question be answered in such a way that rationality turns out to be justified. Thus it is not the case that the rationalist must beg the question against the skeptic or argue in a vicious circle. It is rather the skeptic's own questioning of rationality that secures rationality's epistemic standing; the rationalist needs simply to point this out.

Since the question can be answered this way, the other difficulty that Trigg and O'Hear see--that the demand for a justification of rationality is a bogus demand, since it cannot even in principle be met without introducing overwhelming logical difficulties--is no longer rightly seen as problematic. The question can be answered in a way which avoids question-begging and vicious circularity; consequently there is no reason, even from the Trigg-O'Hear point of view, to regard the demand as a bogus demand. The demand is legitimate, and is met, by appeal to the self-reflexive strategy utilized in the proposed solution. The solution is neither inconsistent, nor question-begging, nor circular.[17]

It remains now only to conclude by spelling out the ramifications of that solution for critical thinking.

Conclusion: 'Why Be Rational?' and Critical Thinking

If we cannot say why we should be rational, then we cannot justify educational efforts aimed at fostering critical thinking. Students who accept our lesson concerning the importance of critical thinking will naturally extend the critical attitude to critically examine critical thinking itself. They will seek reasons for being critical. The demand for reasons for being critical is tantamount to a demand for reasons for being rational. Consequently, our efforts to justify our teaching of critical thinking hinge on our ability to answer the question with which we began: Why be rational?

Fortunately, we *can* say why we should be rational: our question has been answered above. Consequently our educational efforts on behalf of critical thinking can proceed without fear of falling to this justificational worry. In saying why we should be rational, we provide an underlying rationale and justification for our efforts to foster critical thinking in the schools. In so doing, we add an important dimension to the theory of critical thinking--a dimension of philosophical and educational importance.

NOTES

1. The problem of justifying our commitment to critical thinking, and the conception of critical thinking which I am utilizing, are both drawn from and discussed in my *Educating Reason* (London, Routledge, 1988). The problem of justifying rationality, which is this paper's primary concern, is set out on p. 132 of that book. The present effort is an attempt to enlarge the very brief discussion which appears on that page. See also the (equally brief) discussion in my *Relativism Refuted* (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1987), pp. 167-9.

2. *Educating Reason*, op. cit.

3. Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 146.

4. Anthony O'Hear, *Karl Popper*, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 147-9. In what follows I follow O'Hear (and Popper) in using 'rationalism' to refer, not to the doctrines of the Continental Rationalists, but rather to the view that we ought, ideally, to believe and act rationally, i.e. in accordance with reasons which justify our beliefs and actions.

5. Trigg, *Reason and Commitment*, p. 149, emphases in original.

6. O'Hear, *Karl Popper*, p. 150. See also p. 151.

7. Trigg, *Reason and Commitment*, p. 150.
O'Hear suggests that the difficulty here is that what is wanted, but cannot be had, is a non-argumentative justification of rationality:

> The mere fact that there is no non-argumentative demonstration of the rationality of the practices of rationality, given that a justification of a practice demonstrating the value of that practice can take place only within an argumentative context. (op. cit., p 150).

This is a mistaken formulation of the problem, however. What is wanted is an argumentative justification of rationality, one which takes place 'within an argumentative context' but which avoids charges of inconsistency, circularity, and question-begging. O'Hear thinks, with Trigg and Popper, that if the justification proceeds from within an argumentative context, it cannot avoid these logical difficulties (and that if it proceeds outside of such a context, it fails to constitute a justification at all). Below I offer a putative justification from within an argumentative context, which I claim nevertheless avoids these logical pitfalls.

8. This view is also endorsed by Stephen Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1950). Toulmin regards our question (actually, the parallel question in ethics, i.e. 'Why be

moral?') as a 'limiting' question, for which there is no 'logical space' for a literal answer. See pp. 161-5; 202-25. Toulmin's (as well as Trigg's and O'Hears) arguments for the 'logical oddness' of 'Why be rational?', and for the logical impossiblity of providing a general answer to the question--and so, of providing a justification for a commitment to rationality--are heavily influenced by the work of the later Wittgenstein.

9. It also depends rather heavily on a sharp contingent/in principle distiction, which many philosophers nowadays find problematic.

10. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Volume 2, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1962), pp.230-31, emphasis in original.

11. O'Hear, *Karl Popper*, p. 147.

12. Popper's argument for critical rationalism focusses on the moral ramifications of opting for rationalism rather than irrationalism. See Popper, op. ci., pp 232 ff.

13. At this point it would be instructive to treat the literature surrounding W.W. Bartley's 'comprehensive critical rationalism.' I regret that space does not permit me to do so here; in a longer version of this paper I do. See Bartley, *The Retreat to Commitment*, Second edition revised and enlarged, (La Salle, Open Court Publishing Company, 1984). My own solution renders rationality comprehensive, as does Bartley's; but it is less focussed on criticism and falsification than his.

14. I ignore here the possible response noted in the introduction that 'Why be rational?' is a legitimate question but that it cannot be answered affirmatively because we should *not* be rational. Although many thinkers have argued against rationality (see for instance the opening citations from Feyerabend and Dostoevsky, the works of Nietzche and Kierkegaard, etc.), for present purposes their arguements can be ignored, since in *arguing* against rationality they are in fact embracing it rather than rejecting it. A fuller study would show this by examining the details of arguments urging the rejection of rationality.

15. Joaquin Medin points out that I need to clarify the sort of presupposition at work here: logical, semantic, or pragmatic. I beleive that rationality is presupposed in all three senses, although it would take more space than I have here to make the case. I am grateful to Medin for his suggestion.

16. See *Educating Reason*, op. cit., p. 132, which this paragraph builds on, and also the references cited there.

17. Indeed, Trigg seems to realize as much in the course of arguing that the demand is illegitimate:

> Anyone who asks 'why be rational?', by asking for reasons, assumes that there are reasons, and that rationality is in principle possible...he is asking for reasons and thus has already involved himself in the whole process of rationality. (op. cit., p. 149).

Part of the difficulty with this aspect of the Popper/Trigg/O'Hear position is its failure to distinguish between deductive and transcendental justifications. These terms can co-refer, but needn't do; in any case it is clear that my self-reflexive solution is, in the relevant sense, transcendental, while the logical difficulties worried about by our three authors are more germane to deductive justifications. I am grateful to Donald Hatcher for his suggestions on this point.

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